



Seattle Public  
Utilities

## FACT SHEET

### Arsenic and Seattle's Drinking Water Supplies

Revised May 25, 2000

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#### Summary

Testing of Seattle's sources of drinking water indicate that arsenic is not present above 1 part per billion, Seattle's detection limit. **The EPA administrator signed a new Arsenic proposal today - May 25<sup>th</sup>.** The proposed standard is much lower - 5 parts per billion (ppb), than the current standard - 50 ppb. Even if the standard is enacted as proposed, Seattle expects to meet the lower standard.

#### Arsenic Sources and Levels in Seattle's Water

- Arsenic occurs naturally in the environment – in the earth's crust.
- Arsenic is also a byproduct of many industrial activities. Fortunately, industrial sources of arsenic are not present in Seattle's watersheds.
- The most common exposure routes are the consumption of food and water.
- Water systems, including Seattle Public Utilities, have been required to monitor the drinking water sources for arsenic for many years.
- Arsenic is not detected in Seattle's surface water sources - the South Fork Tolt River and the Cedar River – (with a detection limit of 1 part per billion).
- Arsenic levels in Seattle's blended groundwater are generally in the 1-2 part per billion range. Prior to blending, the groundwater has arsenic levels of 3-5 ppb. The groundwater is always blended when used, for a number of reasons, and it is only used every few years.

#### Setting a New Health Standard

- EPA is proposing to lower the MCL to 5 parts per billion.
- Members of some environmental organizations are concerned that EPA's new standard will not be protective enough.
- Health research to help set the new standard is still ongoing. Some research has already been completed – but the findings or applicability are in question.
- It is difficult to reliably measure arsenic at levels below 3 or 4 parts per billion using currently available testing methods.
- Public comments will be taken on the proposal for 90 days.
- If you would like more information about the EPA proposal on arsenic, go to: [www.epa.gov/safewater/ars/proposalfs.html](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/ars/proposalfs.html)

#### Questions?

Contact Water Quality at 206-615-0827 or [water.quality@ci.seattle.wa.us](mailto:water.quality@ci.seattle.wa.us).